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Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted to the Economic and Social Council in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1823 (XVII) and Council resolutions 1817 (LV) and 1998/46. The report highlights the central role of the regional dimension in translating the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into national sustainable development realities. The first part of the report shows how the assets and core functions of the regional commissions are leveraged in an integrated manner and with the addition of value to support the efforts of Member States to implement the 2030 Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals, through the provision of dedicated regional intergovernmental platforms with strong national ownership, such as the regional forums on sustainable development, the generation of multisectoral and policy-relevant knowledge and data, and the promotion of regional and subregional integration and cooperation. In this context, the report provides illustrative examples of contributions by the regional commissions to better support the implementation of, follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda.

The second part of the report covers developments and outcomes in selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation, including policy matters addressed during the sessions of the regional commissions and other intergovernmental meetings; efforts to promote coherence at the regional level, including through the respective Regional Coordination Mechanisms and the implementation of the statement of collaboration between the regional commissions and the United Nations Development Group; and enhanced cooperation among the regional commissions.

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I. The regional dimension in support of the 2030 Agenda

A. Dedicated regional intergovernmental platforms with strong national ownership

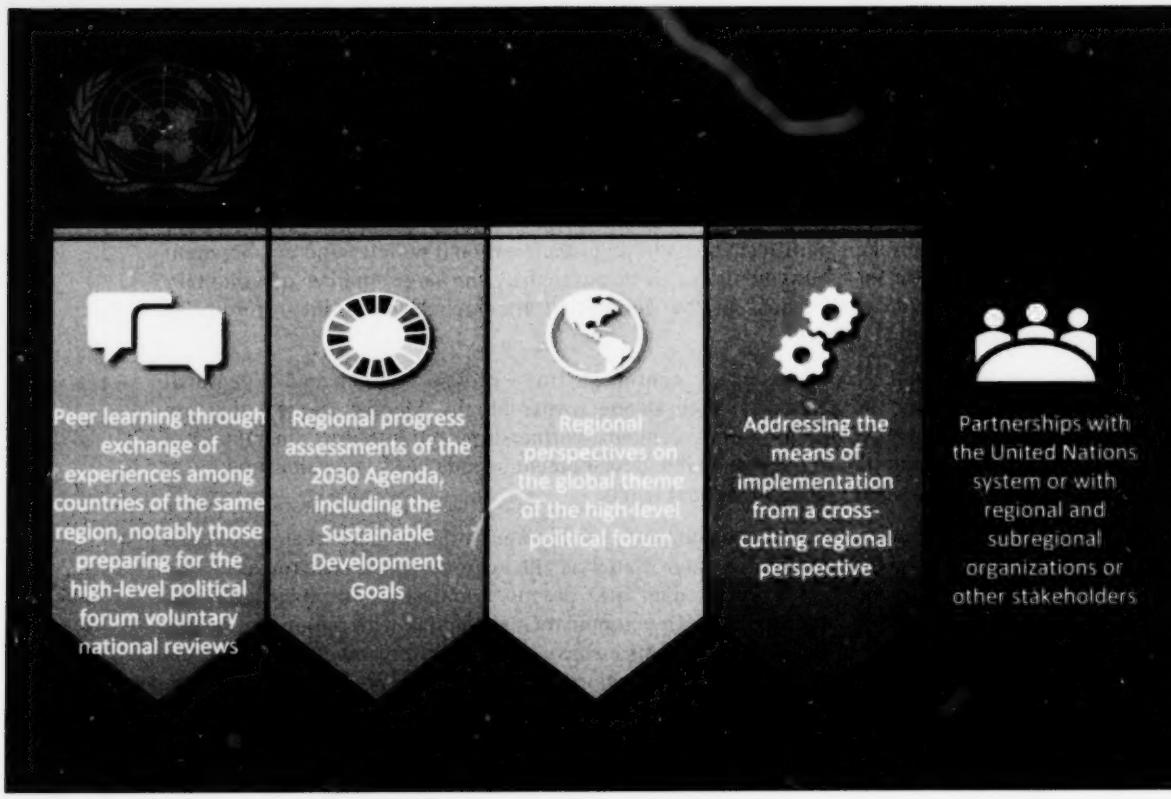
1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a universal, integrated and indivisible framework for action to address key development challenges, and recognizes the pivotal role of the regional dimension to promote integration and cooperation and translate global goals into national sustainable development realities. Three years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Member States in all regions have already undertaken significant steps to align their national policies and development planning with its requirements, as demonstrated by the large number of voluntary national reviews presented in the context of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

2. Regional commissions continue to provide dedicated regional intergovernmental platforms, with strong ownership by Member States, that are conducive to the facilitation of agreements, partnerships and initiatives in support of the implementation of the sustainable development agenda and to decision-making at the regional, subregional and global levels.

3. The regional forums on sustainable development, organized between March and May 2018, have consolidated their status as the regional platforms for assessing progress and exchanging knowledge, best practices and solutions to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, in line with regional priorities and specificities. In this context, countries have continued to receive support for the preparation of voluntary national reviews, benefiting from the wealth of knowledge and experiences shared in these forums.[1] As part of their programme, they all addressed the global theme of the 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development ("Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies") from the regional perspective, thus constituting meaningful stepping-stones towards the process of following up and reviewing the Sustainable Development Goals.

[1] For detailed information about the 2018 regional forums on sustainable development, see E/HLPF/2018/2, E/HLPF/2018/2/Add.1, E/HLPF/2018/2/Add.2, E/HLPF/2018/2/Add.3, E/HLPF/2018/2/Add.4 and E/HLPF/2018/2/Add.5.

Figure I
Regional forums on sustainable development


Peer learning through exchange of experiences among countries of the same region, notably those preparing for the high-level political forum voluntary national reviews
Regional progress assessments of the 2030 Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals
Regional perspectives on the global theme of the high-level political forum
Addressing the means of implementation from a cross-cutting regional perspective
Partnerships with the United Nations system or with regional and subregional organizations or other stakeholders

4. Other significant examples of regional intergovernmental platforms harnessed to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda are listed below.

5. In the area of statistics, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) hosted the sixth high-level global conference on Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange, which was instrumental in supporting countries in keeping abreast with current development in data and statistics management using Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange and in improving the monitoring of progress in the achievement of their national development goals.

6. Critical development challenges for the Arab region were prioritized in the intergovernmental platforms convened by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). For example, the Arab Regional Forum for Sustainable Development was preceded by three thematic preparatory meetings that were focused on water, energy and the environment, respectively.

7. In addition, ESCWA hosted the twelfth session of the Intergovernmental Committee on Financing for Development, the only regional intergovernmental setting that provides a venue for Arab constituents to address financing for development issues in an integrated manner, in December 2017.

8. Similarly, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) organized the fourth High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, bringing together government officials, central bank governors and other regional stakeholders. The high-level dialogues have now been integrated into the revamped

ESCAP committee on macroeconomic policy, poverty reduction and financing for development, to pursue policy consensus and the effective implementation of measures at the regional level.

9. Another example in promoting the means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda in the Asia-Pacific region is the Committee on Trade and Investment, which meets annually under the auspices of ESCAP. In this context, ESCAP supports the implementation of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific and has facilitated five national consultations on accession and ratification of the Agreement at the request of member States. ESCAP has also been tasked with drafting a road map for the implementation of the substantive provisions of this regional United Nations treaty.

10. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) is leveraging its convening power and technical expertise to provide innovative pathways in support of the 2030 Agenda and its means of implementation. The adoption in March 2018 of the first legally binding agreement in Latin America and the Caribbean to protect the rights of access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters (principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development), the culmination of a negotiation process that started in 2014 in which ECLAC served as technical secretariat, is a case in point. In the area of information technology, in April 2018 ECLAC member States adopted the Cartagena Declaration, approving the Digital Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean for the period 2018–2020, during the Sixth Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean.

11. The Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee held its twenty-seventh session on 27 April 2018 in Saint Lucia. In this context, in May 2018 ECLAC launched the first issue of *The Caribbean Outlook*, a report that addresses the principal development challenges faced by the subregion and proposes forward-looking measures, such as the debt for climate adaptation swap initiative.

12. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) has used its dedicated sectoral intergovernmental platforms to develop norms and standards in support of the 2030 Agenda. Examples of this normative work are the five multilateral environmental agreements (on air pollution; watercourses and international lakes; industrial accidents; environmental impact assessment; and environmental matters), as well as the international transport conventions. This normative work is complemented by technical cooperation activities to implement the norms at the country level, and to address issues of a transboundary nature. These platforms facilitate the integration of various sectoral activities to address policy concerns and the development of initiatives, such as the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy and the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air initiative.

13. Another example is the work on environmental statistics carried out by the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, whose work is aimed at assisting the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia in their efforts to correctly apply the Shared Environmental Information System data methodologies and to apply environmental indicators in the context of sustainable development and green economy initiatives, among other things.

B. Multisectoral and policy-relevant knowledge and data

14. As repositories of knowledge, technical expertise and data on diverse development issues, the regional commissions advance multisectoral research and analysis, thus helping to shape the national and global discourse on the Sustainable

Development Goals and to identify synergies and opportunities for concerted action. In doing so, the regional commissions promote integration, innovation and balanced progress across the 2030 Agenda.

15. Recognizing the opportunity that regional cooperation offers to address transboundary development challenges, Asia and the Pacific was the first region to develop a regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda. The road map identifies priority thematic areas of regional cooperation in the region, including social development, disaster risk reduction and resilience; climate change; the management of natural resources; connectivity; and energy. As part of this comprehensive effort, ESCAP has been implementing a rapid response facility that provides quick and effective response to support countries in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, ESCAP has made intellectual contributions to regional policy dialogues through a range of knowledge products, such as the statistical report on Sustainable Development Goal baselines and progress, and innovative statistical measurement frameworks and tools.

16. ESCAP has increased the availability of and access to regional development data by redesigning its statistical database and developing a regional Sustainable Development Goal data portal under the tripartite Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Goal Partnership involving ESCAP, the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These two knowledge platforms complement each other and expand the evidence base for development policy analysis and for progress assessment at the regional and subregional levels. The Partnership produced the *Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Goals Outlook* report in 2017 and a series of reports that follow the thematic areas of the high-level political forum.

17. Research and in-depth analytical studies have also been a priority of ESCAP in its work on financing for development. ESCAP has produced a major publication on tax policy for sustainable development in 2018; the first regional report on progress and policy reforms in the pursuit of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development; a joint paper with Oxfam on addressing inequality through tax policy; and a number of analytical papers and country studies on, among other things, public finance, infrastructure financing and public-private partnerships.

18. The second annual report on regional progress and challenges in relation to the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean explored the theme of the current cycle of the high-level political forum ("Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies") and was focused on the Sustainable Development Goals under review in 2018, in addition to Goal 17. The report, inter alia, set out regional progress made in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, assessed trends, advances and gaps in each country, identified critical links and provided corresponding policy recommendations.

19. Analytical products on the financing for development agenda have continued to be at the core of ECLAC knowledge-generation activities. ECLAC called for strengthening the role of fiscal policy as an instrument of stabilization and a driver of economic growth in its annual flagship publication *Fiscal Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean*. The 2018 edition analysed fiscal policy in the region over the past three decades and the implementation challenges of the 2030 Agenda.

20. A key example of how ECLAC is leveraging its analytical and research function by contributing to the public policy debate on key issues of the development agenda in support of the Latin American and Caribbean region is the main institutional document drafted for the biannual ECLAC session. During the reporting period, ECLAC prepared a position document, *The Inefficiency of Inequality*, to facilitate

intergovernmental discussions at the thirty-seventh session of the Commission, held in Cuba in May 2018. The document was endorsed by ECLAC member States as a meaningful analytical framework of reference for the formulation of policies aimed at eliminating poverty, reducing inequality and shifting towards sustainable patterns of production and consumption in Latin America and the Caribbean.

21. Another example of ECLAC leveraging its knowledge generation and advisory function is its recent position document *Data, Algorithms and Policies: Redefining the Digital World*, issued in April 2018 and launched at the Sixth Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean.

22. During the reporting period, ECLAC worked in close partnership with entities of United Nations development system in Latin America and the Caribbean such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) on the various aspects of the 2030 Agenda. Joint publications issued in 2017 and 2018 include the ECLAC-UNICEF quarterly bulletin on child poverty from different perspectives; the ECLAC-ILO bulletin entitled "Employment situation in Latin America and the Caribbean: labour immigration in Latin America"; "The outlook for agriculture and rural development in the Americas: a perspective on Latin America and the Caribbean 2017–2018", published by ECLAC and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); and "The cost of the double burden of malnutrition", published jointly with WFP.

23. ECA has continued to develop knowledge products on a range of issues pertinent to the development priorities of Africa, such as inclusive and green growth, innovative financing for sustainable development, natural resources management and governance, illicit financial flows, regional integration, trade, urbanization, industrialization and infrastructure. These knowledge products have translated into country-level support and policy advice. For example, six East African Community member States, as well as Benin and Guinea, adopted policies and measures on implementing activities in the area of development planning in line with the recommendations of ECA. ECA also provided technical support for the creation and validation of two national visions: Benin vision 2040 and Guinea vision 2040. It is currently providing similar support to the Government of Niger for its national development plan.

24. To track the progress made in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063, ECA, together with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, prepared the 2018 *Africa Sustainable Development Report*. The report reviews the performance of Africa with regard to five goals and related targets and indicators of the 2030 Agenda, taking into account their correlation to Agenda 2063, thus promoting synergies between the regional and global agendas.

25. ECA, in one of its flagship publications, *Economic Report on Africa 2017*, featured the links between urbanization and industrialization, and stressed the urgent need to connect urban and industrial development in Africa. As a result, more than 10 countries committed to the adoption of strategies to integrate urbanization into national development planning and strategically link it to industrialization in order to enhance employment, economic opportunities and livelihoods.

26. In collaboration with other organizations, ECA continued to strengthen the capacity of member States in mainstreaming land policy and land governance into their national development plans and in the negotiation of large-scale land-based investments. Member States such as Angola, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, the Niger and Somalia, implemented land governance programmes designed in accordance with the Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa,

developed jointly by ECA, AfDB and the African Union Commission, and voluntary guidelines developed by FAO.

27. To support the implementation of the Paris Agreement, ECA established the African partnership facility for nationally determined contributions, which is being operationalized within the pan-Africa hub for nationally determined contributions coordinated by AfDB, to support member States in the implementation of their nationally determined contributions through facilitation and the sharing of information, knowledge and skills.

28. A regional and statistical progress assessment of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, in addition to a broader analytical component on interlinkages that are of particular relevance to the Arab region, were presented in the 2017 edition of the *Arab Sustainable Development Report*. To complement this overall assessment, ESCWA also teamed up with various United Nations and regional entities to produce sector-specific reports in the areas of energy, water, climate change and food security.

29. In-depth analyses have addressed challenges specific to the region, for example, in the forthcoming ESCWA study on "The impact of conflict over the life cycle: evidence for the Arab region", which is focused on the lasting effects of exposure to conflict over the life cycle and skill formation in the Arab region, using micro-level survey data, for Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

30. Regional measuring efforts are also applied in support of means of implementation, notably the financing for development agenda, for example, with the "Arab financing for development scorecard", developed by ESCWA as a regional toolbox to measure the financing requirements and availability of finance to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

31. Monitoring and measuring activities also include the provision of capacity-building support to countries. For example, with regard to statistics, numerous initiatives were carried out in partnership with the United Nations and international and regional organizations, such as: (a) the second meeting of the Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses in Arab Countries; (b) three regional meetings on Sustainable Development Goal indicators based on the International Conference on Population and Development; and (c) two national workshops on population and housing censuses for Libya and the Sudan, among others. In cooperation with the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, ESCWA developed the first regional guidelines on harmonized disability statistics, an essential tool for reviewing the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

32. ECE has continued to develop evidence-based policy advice and recommendations in various areas, at the request of its member States. Prime examples are the country-level assessments carried out on environmental performance, innovation, housing and land management, and trade barriers. Environmental performance reviews have, for example, informed policy decisions in a variety of areas, such as sustainable transport.

33. In this connection, significant research and analysis is carried out under the auspices of the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, supported by various intergovernmental groups. For example, the Task Force on Emission Inventories and Projections assists parties in the reporting of official air pollutant emissions and projections of data. It also provides a technical forum and network of experts to identify problems related to data reporting.

34. With the support of the International Road Transport Union, ECE has developed SafeFITS (Safe Future Inland Transport Systems), a robust road safety decision-making tool for identifying the most appropriate road safety policies. The ForFITS (For Future Inland Transport Systems) tool was developed to assist national and local

governments in monitoring carbon dioxide emissions coming from inland transport modes and in selecting and designing climate change mitigation policies, based on their impact and local conditions.

35. Cooperation with other organizations has also resulted in valuable contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals under review during the 2018 high-level political forum, with a focus on challenges specific to the region. The new study on energy efficiency, *Overcoming Barriers to Investing in Energy Efficiency*, presents insights from practitioners on the challenges and solutions with regard to overcoming barriers to energy efficiency investments, as derived from a survey of ECE countries and beyond. This study represents a useful tool for policymakers and is the outcome of a collaboration between ECE and the Copenhagen Centre on Energy Efficiency, part of the UNEP DTU Partnership.

C. Regional and subregional integration and cooperation

36. The promotion of regional and subregional cooperation and integration is at the core of the mandate of the regional commissions. The commissions contribute to the development of integrated solutions to transboundary challenges, including through joint policy responses, regional positions, norms and standards and the dissemination of tools and methodologies (e.g., on trade, transport, energy, water management, climate change adaptation and financing for development). As such, outcomes of regional forums and regional responses to shared challenges constitute valuable building blocks for the development of global action agendas.

37. ECLAC leverages its regional and subregional cooperation function in terms of facilitating cooperation and fostering partnerships between its member States and other regions. For example, in May 2018 ECLAC signed a new bilateral cooperation agreement with the Government of the Republic of Korea aimed at promoting trade and sustainable urban and rural development in the countries of the ECLAC region.

38. ECLAC carried out technical and advisory missions, as well as training activities, in developing countries in other regions in an effort to promote South-South and triangular cooperation, for example, by replicating the ECLAC methodology on calculating the cost of hunger in several African countries, in collaboration with ECA and WFP.

39. In terms of subregional cooperation, ECLAC is supporting the integration process of the Pacific Alliance, a mechanism formed by Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru, as well the convergence between the Pacific Alliance and the Southern Common Market as key to the development of trade and productive integration in the region.

40. ECLAC also supported regional integration and interregional cooperation mechanisms, and made technical contributions to the Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and China that was held in Santiago in January 2018,[2] as well as to the Summit of the Americas held in Peru in April 2018.

41. ESCAP is effectively promoting regional and subregional integration and cooperation, in line with the regional economic cooperation and integration framework. The region reaffirmed its commitment to the framework as an enabler of sustainable development and the synergies of its priority areas with the regional road map, at the second Ministerial Conference on Regional Economic Cooperation and

[2] In this context, ECLAC presented a study entitled "Exploring new forms of cooperation between China and Latin America and the Caribbean", analysing the joint journey since the first meeting of the China-CELAC Forum, held in Beijing in 2015, and the evolution of trade, finance and investment relations.

Integration in Asia and the Pacific, held in November 2017. These priority areas include promoting market integration by striving to reduce trade costs through facilitating trade and addressing trade protectionism; developing seamless connectivity across the region in transport, energy and information and communications technology; enhancing financial cooperation in domestic resource mobilization, financial inclusion, capital markets and public-private partnerships; and addressing shared vulnerabilities and risks to mitigate the impact of disasters, environmental degradation and climate change.

42. In the area of trade and investment, ESCAP promotes cooperation and integration through various modalities, including the Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade, the United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific and formal intergovernmental mechanisms such as the Committee on Trade and Investment, the intergovernmental steering group on cross-border paperless trade, and the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement. In addition, the harmonization of foreign direct investment regulations and policies among ESCAP member States and capacity-building in foreign direct investment are pursued through the annual Asia-Pacific Foreign Direct Investment Network for Least Developed and Landlocked Developing Countries. Business engagement through regional cooperation is considered essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and is pursued through the ESCAP Sustainable Business Network and the annual Asia-Pacific Business Forum and the Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum.

43. The Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, including the Regional Action Programme for Sustainable Transport Connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2017–2021), was endorsed at the seventy-third session of ESCAP, in May 2017. Through the Regional Action Programme; the Committee on Transport; working groups on the Asian highway network, the trans-Asian railway network and dry ports; the biennial programme of work; and related transport facilitation frameworks, models and tools, ESCAP has contributed to the achievement of regional and subregional integration and cooperation.

44. ECA, in collaboration with global, regional and subregional development partners, has been responding to specific needs and priorities of member States in relation to the regional and subregional integration agenda. A notable achievement during the reporting period was the successful provision of technical support and training to member States and the African Union Commission in the negotiations for the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area. ECA provided the draft text that was used as the basis for the negotiations. The support provided by ECA contributed to the successful conclusion by member States of the negotiations, resulting in the four main legal instruments underpinning the African Continental Free Trade Area: the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area; the Protocol on Trade in Goods; the Protocol on Trade in Services; and the Protocol on Rules and Procedures for the Settlement of Disputes. The Agreement was signed by 44 African member States in March 2018 at the extraordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union held in Kigali. Other areas in which ECA made significant contributions include the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel; the common single currency of the Economic Community of West African States; and the single African air transport market, which is aimed at boosting intra-African Trade and fast tracking the African Continental Free Trade Area. The single African air transport market has now become a flagship project under Agenda 2063 of the African Union. To date, 26 States have signed the solemn commitment to the Market; ECA, jointly with African Union Commission, continues

its advocacy work to bring the remaining member onboard for full operationalization of the Market.

45. In promoting the critical role that information and communications technologies play in catalysing regional integration and industrialization, ECA made significant contributions to the ongoing efforts to establish the Southern African Development Community information and communications technology observatory, a central platform for facilitating the collection and dissemination of information and communications technology indicators.

46. In the area of mining, ECA provided advisory services and technical assistance to support 21 member States in their efforts to develop policies that are compliant with the African Mining Vision. Countries such as Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Zambia have consequently explored and taken measures to review their mining codes as well as renegotiate contracts. The impact of these activities was also visible at the regional level, with the development of the African Minerals Governance Framework; the African Geological and Mineral Information System Strategy; and the atlas of the African blue economy and African deep-sea mining.

47. In response to global intergovernmental mandates, ESCWA plays a key regional role in coordinating efforts and developing regional positions on issues such as international migration, displacement and development, bringing together member States, United Nations entities and other stakeholders in the Arab region. The regional cooperation spearheaded by ESCWA is particularly rich in the area of statistics, resulting in the release of a number of guidelines, such as on harmonized disability statistics.

48. Several thematic strategies in response to acute development challenges in the region have been developed with the support of ESCWA. Key examples include the Arab Strategy for Sustainable Energy, endorsed at the twelfth meeting of the Arab Ministerial Council for Electricity, and the Arab regional strategy for sustainable consumption and production, adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment. Similarly, ESCWA supports Arab States through the Regional Mechanism for Improved Monitoring and Reporting on Access to Water Supply and Sanitation Services in the Arab Region.

49. The Arab Permanent Committee on Meteorology also adopted recommendations that solicited the continued support of ESCWA in the area of capacity-building on climate change. A series of regional training workshops for climate change negotiators in the Arab region was organized by ESCWA with various partners. The support provided by the League of Arab States, the World Meteorological Organization and ESCWA resulted in the establishment of the Arab Climate Outlook Forum, which held its first meeting in March 2018.

50. ECE works to address transboundary challenges and enhance connectivity and integration in the region through improved transport links and the facilitation of trade.

51. In the area of transport, the ECE Inland Transport Committee has developed an extensive normative body, including 57 international agreements and conventions, which provides the international legal and technical framework for the development of international road, rail, inland waterway and combined transport in the countries of the ECE region. Examples in this area include the Trans-European North-South Motorway, Trans-European Railway and Euro-Asian Transport Links projects, which facilitate the coordination of transport infrastructure programmes among participating countries.

52. In its work on trade, ECE seeks to develop closer cooperation between its members and facilitate their integration into the world economy. A major focus of the

activities in this regard is trade facilitation, which is supported by recommendations produced by intergovernmental bodies and by policy advisory and capacity-building work, and often conducted in partnership with relevant entities, such as the Eurasian Economic Commission.

53. Since June 2018, ECE has been supporting efforts in the western Balkans subregion to identify the challenges and opportunities related to accelerating progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in line with the focus of these countries on accession to the European Union. These efforts have facilitated the sharing of information and best practices, mapping the connections and gaps between the Goals and the European Union acquis, and nationalizing the Goals to accelerate progress on implementation and monitoring.

54. A case in point in the promotion of regional cooperation with a holistic, cross-sectoral approach is the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, supported by ECE and ESCAP and covering trade, transport, water, energy, the environment, the knowledge-based economy, statistics and gender. The Programme's Governing Council, at its twelfth session, on 6 December 2017, adopted the conclusions and recommendations of the Programme's 2017 economic forum on innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals in the region covered by the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia and underscored the importance of devising an innovation strategy for the region covered by the Special Programme to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

II. Developments and outcomes in selected areas of regional and interregional cooperation

A. Major policy issues addressed by the regional commissions at their ministerial sessions and other high-level meetings

55. In addition to the policy issues discussed in the context of the regional forums on sustainable development and other regional platforms described above, the regional commissions have deliberated on a number of areas relevant to their respective regions at their sessions and at other high-level meetings.

56. Four regional commissions held their sessions in 2018 as decided by their member States. The table below contains highlights and focuses of the sessions of the commissions held in 2018.

Commission sessions in 2018

Thirty-seventh session of ECLAC (biennial)	Havana 7–11 May 2018	The session included a ministerial segment focused on the theme of the inefficiency of inequality and emphasized that pro-equality policies not only produced positive effects in terms of social well-being but also helped to create an economic system that was propitious for learning, innovation, higher productivity and environmental protection
Seventy-fourth session of ESCAP (annual)	Bangkok 11–16 May 2018	The session included a ministerial segment focused on the theme of inequality in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and identified policies for reducing all forms of inequality for a more inclusive, prosperous and sustainable future for all
Fifty-first session of ECA (annual)	Addis Ababa 11–15 May 2018	The session included a ministerial segment focused on the theme of the African Continental Free Trade Area and the creation of fiscal space for jobs and economic diversification
Thirtieth session of ESCWA (biennial)	Beirut 25–28 June 2018	The session included a ministerial segment focused on technology for sustainable development, with an emphasis on the impact on employment and youth

57. The commissions also discussed other sectoral policy matters at their sessions and other high-level meetings, such as the linkage between resource efficiency and pollution reduction, which was discussed during the first Asia-Pacific Ministerial Summit on the Environment; the development of sustainable inland navigation transportation systems, which was the topic of an international ministerial conference in the ECE region; and industrialization on the African continent, as discussed at the tenth session of the Committee on Regional Cooperation and Integration, organized by ECA.

B. Promoting coherence at the regional level through the Regional Coordination Mechanism and an enhanced policy-operational nexus

Regional Coordination Mechanisms

58. The Regional Coordination Mechanisms (RCM) were mandated by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1998/46 of 31 July 1998 (annex III, para. 13).

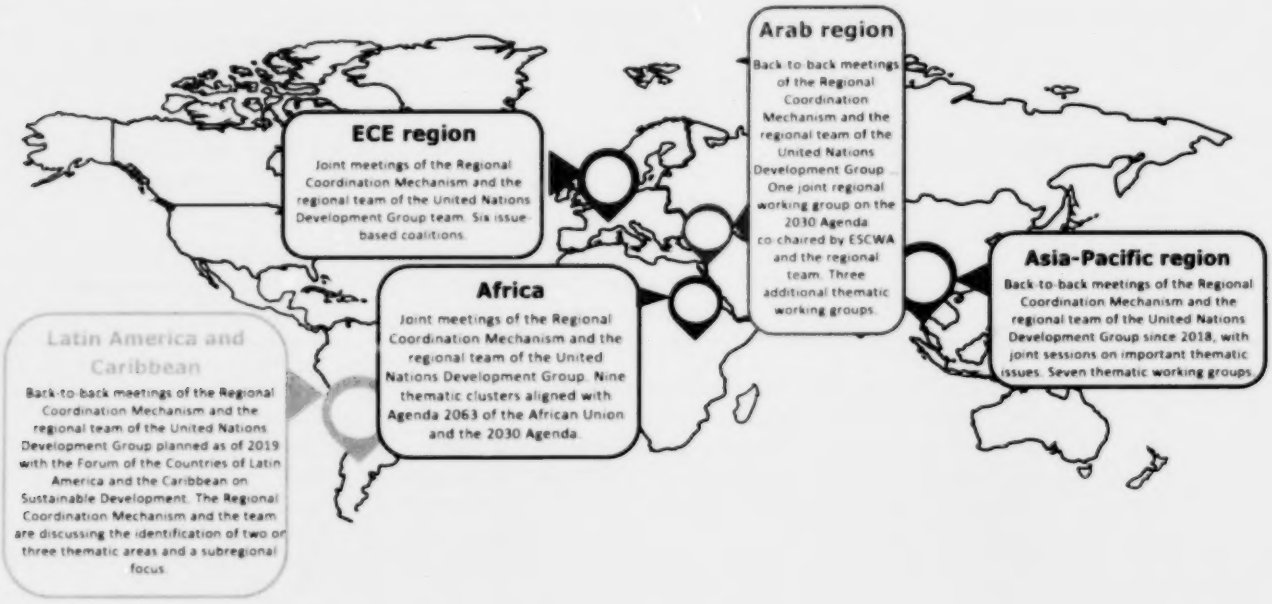
59. The role and functions of the Regional Coordination Mechanism in promoting coherence in policy and in regional and subregional programming are being reinvigorated within the new parameters and frameworks for strategic engagement by the United Nations development system in the regions. Its role is increasingly relevant in order to meet the integrated policy advice needs of the 2030 Agenda; strengthen the policy-operational linkage, including in strategic planning and regional and subregional programming; avoid duplication and overlap; and ensure more coherent and robust accountability to the Economic and Social Council and its oversight of the regional-level results.

60. All five Regional Coordination Mechanisms have taken action to align themselves with the 2030 Agenda, and their work feeds into the regional forums on sustainable development. While Mechanism working arrangements, as well as the level of interaction with the regional teams of the United Nations Development

Group, vary from region to region, efforts are now being made in all regions to convene meetings of the Mechanisms and the regional teams jointly or back to back, pending a broader repositioning of the regional level, to be proposed and decided upon by Member States as an integral part of the United Nations development system repositioning to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

61. Figure II contains highlights of each Regional Coordination Mechanism.

Figure II
United Nations regional coordination mechanisms


Arab region
Back-to-back meetings of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and the regional team of the United Nations Development Group. One joint regional working group on the 2030 Agenda co-chaired by ESCWA and the regional team. Three additional thematic working groups.
ECE region
Joint meetings of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and the regional team of the United Nations Development Group team. Six issue-based coalitions.
Africa
Joint meetings of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and the regional team of the United Nations Development Group. Nine thematic clusters aligned with Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the 2030 Agenda.
Asia-Pacific region
Back-to-back meetings of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and the regional team of the United Nations Development Group since 2018, with joint sessions on important thematic issues. Seven thematic working groups.
Latin America and Caribbean
Back-to-back meetings of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and the regional team of the United Nations Development Group planned as of 2019 with the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development. The Regional Coordination Mechanism and the team are discussing the identification of two or three thematic areas and a subregional focus.

62. In the ECE region, the practice of joint meetings of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and the United Nations Development Group regional team for Europe and Central Asia continued. The work of the United Nations in the region has evolved over the past few years from information exchange and coordination to analytical work, advocacy, country support and positioning with regard to the 2030 Agenda. This has led to a number of visible results in terms of United Nations thought leadership in the region and to being recognized as a useful cooperation model to increase regional and country-level impact.

63. In 2018, the regional United Nations system discussed the reform of the United Nations development system, including ways to broaden and optimize the collaborative space for greater impact at the regional and national levels. It took stock of the Sustainable Development Goal mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support missions, in order to evaluate the results obtained, identify lessons learned and prepare plans for the future. Another discussion examined how to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in European Union member States.

64. The joint regional meeting has set up six issue-based coalitions[3] to coordinate the United Nations response to cross-cutting challenges in the region, realize synergies and serve as multi-partner platforms to reach out to non-United Nations

[3] On (a) health, (b) gender, (c) migrants and internally displaced persons, (d) social protection, (e) youth and adolescents, and (f) data.

stakeholders. ECE participates in the issue-based coalitions on gender and data. Within these, ECE expertise on Sustainable Development Goal data and measurement and capacity-building for national statistical offices is pooled with the Goal-related data work of other United Nations entities.

65. The Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa serves as a regional platform for all United Nations entities operating in the region to coordinate their strategies for programme delivery in support of member States, the African Union and its New Partnership for Africa's Development Programme.

66. The Regional Coordination Mechanism has nine thematic clusters aligned with Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the 2030 Agenda.[4] As the secretariat of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa, ECA convened the nineteenth session of the Mechanism and the second joint meeting of the Mechanism and the United Nations Development Group regional team for Eastern and Southern Africa in Addis Ababa in May 2018. The session was aimed at assessing how the Mechanism could better ensure the coherent and effective delivery of United Nations support in implementing Africa's development agenda in partnership with the African Union and its organs. It also provided an opportunity for the United Nations and the African Union to strategize on efforts to combat corruption and illicit financial flows with a view to ensuring Africa's transformation and success in implementing the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

67. The Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism has seven thematic working groups[5] to address all the Sustainable Development Goals and their interlinkages and leverage system-wide action on the implementation of the Goals. The Mechanism and its thematic working groups have delivered significant results. The following highlighted results are illustrative of the Mechanism's dynamism and potential: the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, adopted by member States, was prepared in collaboration with the Mechanism; and the Mechanism's thematic working groups led the preparation of dedicated round-table discussions during the 2018 Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, which examined progress on the Sustainable Development Goals to be reviewed at the 2018 high-level political forum. The Mechanism also acts as the principal coordination mechanism for the implementation of the Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the United Nations (2016–2020), which has resulted in greatly enhanced collaboration between the United Nations and the Association.

68. Steps have been taken to ensure closer coordination between the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism and the United Nations Development Group regional team for Asia and the Pacific. In 2018, Mechanism and regional team meetings were held back to back, with joint sessions on relevant thematic issues.

69. In the Arab region, ESCWA has leveraged its role as the convener of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Arab States, bringing together regional United

[4] On (a) sustainable and inclusive economic growth, industry, trade, agriculture and agroprocessing, and regional integration; (b) infrastructure development; (c) human capital development, health, nutrition, science, technology and innovation; (d) labour, employment creation, social protection, migration and mobility; (e) gender equality, women and youth empowerment; (f) humanitarian matters and disaster risk management; (g) environment, urbanization and population; (h) advocacy, information, communications and culture; and (i) peace and security.

[5] On (a) disaster risk reduction and resilience; (b) Education 2030-plus; (c) gender equality and empowerment of women; (d) inclusive development and poverty eradication; (e) resource-efficient growth; (f) statistics; and (g) sustainable societies.

Nations partners and the League of Arab States as well as multilateral development banks and other stakeholders. In 2017, the Mechanism consolidated all inter-agency work on the 2030 Agenda under the framework of one joint regional working group on the Agenda co-chaired by ESCWA and the United Nations Development Group regional team for the Arab States, the Middle East and Northern Africa. Through four thematic and output-based task forces, the working group harnesses the collective strength of all the United Nations agencies to undertake joint research, consensus-building, capacity-building, advocacy and knowledge exchange, as well as follow-up and review of the new global agenda. Among other activities, the working group supported the organization of the 2017 and 2018 Arab Regional Forums for Sustainable Development and discussed the harmonization of efforts on Sustainable Development Goal data and cooperation on country support.

70. Other working groups of the Mechanism include the working group on international migration, co-chaired by ESCWA, the International Organization for Migration and the League of Arab States; the working group on food security and nutrition, co-chaired by FAO and WFP; and the working group on water, co-chaired by ESCWA and the League of Arab States.

71. In 2017, the annual meeting of the Mechanism was held back to back with the meeting of the United Nations Development Group regional team, a practice that was well received and will be continued in the future. Mechanism members also met on the margins of the Arab Regional Forum in 2018, and plans are under way for the Mechanism's 2018 meeting to be held back to back with the meeting of the regional team in October 2018 at the headquarters of the League of Arab States in Cairo.

72. During the reporting period and on the margins of the second meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, held in Santiago from 18 to 20 April 2018, ECLAC convened and chaired a meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Latin America and the Caribbean that saw the participation of 16 regional directors and representatives of United Nations entities and a representative of the Deputy Secretary-General.

73. The objective of the meeting was to review the ongoing reform of the United Nations development system in the current regional context of Latin America and the Caribbean and agree on common messages to be transmitted to the second meeting of the Forum.

74. The Mechanism decided that it would hold meetings with the United Nations Development Group regional team for Latin America and the Caribbean on a systematic basis and back to back with the meetings of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development. The meetings will be open to the participation of United Nations resident coordinators from the region attending the Forum.

75. It was also decided that the forthcoming third annual report on regional progress and challenges in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, to be presented at the third meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, in 2019, would be a joint inter-agency report of the United Nations development system in Latin America and the Caribbean, to be coordinated by ECLAC and prepared with entities of the United Nations Development Group regional team for Latin America and the Caribbean. The Mechanism and the regional team will also identify and select two or three thematic areas, and possibly subregions, to focus regional efforts of the United Nations development system for concrete work in the near future.

Statement of collaboration between the regional commissions and the United Nations Development Group

76. In addition to the alignment of the regional architecture described above, efforts are being made to strengthen the country-regional nexus. The statement of collaboration signed by the regional commissions and the Chair of the United Nations Development Group in 2016 covers a wide range of areas. The General Assembly, in its resolution 71/243, called for the full implementation of the statement.

77. Substantial progress has been made in its implementation, in particular as it relates to the strengthened collaboration among the regional commissions, resident coordinators and the United Nations country teams; increased exchange of information on existing analytical work; and collaboration in support of member States for the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals into national development frameworks in select countries in Africa. Other areas of notable progress include the enhanced collaboration between the Regional Coordination Mechanisms and the regional teams of the United Nations Development Group, the increased number of regional inter-agency reports; and the application of common methodologies and approaches in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Finally, there are areas where it is recognized that additional efforts towards full implementation are needed; for example, entities at the regional level should provide greater and more consistent normative and policy support to United Nations country teams.

78. The table below contains highlights on a region-by-region basis.

ECE region	ECE is a signatory to 17 United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks in its region, providing its normative and related advisory services to programme countries at the national level. ECE also contributes its expertise by participating in mainstreaming, acceleration and policy support missions. The Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is organized by ECE in close cooperation with the regional United Nations system. In 2018, for example, a number of United Nations entities co-organized peer learning round tables at the Regional Forum on various Sustainable Development Goals under in-depth review. Resident coordinators for countries conducting voluntary national reviews in 2018 were attending the Regional Forum. ECE convenes videoconferences on a regular basis with resident coordinators and the UNDP Istanbul regional hub. Resident Coordinators are regularly connected to meetings of the regional United Nations system to report on the situations in their countries and discuss the support needed from the regional level. The practice of resident coordinators visiting ECE when they are in Geneva has been initiated. A working group on technical cooperation contributes an inter-divisional, cross-sectoral dimension and integration support for delivering ECE technical cooperation.
Africa	ECA continued to make its technical, analytical and policy capacity support available to the United Nations country teams in Africa. ECA is actively involved in the design and implementation of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks. The Frameworks provide subregional and regional perspectives on development issues of concern to the United Nations country teams, while the country profiles and the structural transformation, employment, production and society (STEPS) profiles produced by ECA provide the United Nations country team with a strong analytical tool in the search for credible pathways and policy options for transforming the economies of member States.

ECA is a signatory to the United Nations Development Assistance Plan for Rwanda for the period 2013–2018, which supported the realization of internationally agreed development goals, the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals, the country's medium-term national development priorities as set out in the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy for the period 2013–2018, and Vision 2020 (Rwanda).

It also provided support for the formulation of the Niger strategy for sustainable development and inclusive growth, Niger 2035, and its five-year implementation plan, for the period 2017–2021.

In close collaboration with United Nations country teams, ECA is assisting member States that are heavily dependent on oil exports in drawing up their respective economic diversification strategies. It also contributes its expertise to the United Nations country team effort to mainstream the 2030 Agenda into national development plans and strategies.

ECA is working closely with resident coordinators in all activities carried out at the country level.

Asia and the Pacific

To enhance substantive support for United Nations country teams in the region, ESCAP reached out to all resident coordinators in September 2017 with a list of the analytical products and services that it could provide to the teams.

A number of resident coordinators responded positively, leading to excellent collaborative engagement at the country level. During the fifth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, held in March 2018, a round-table discussion was organized with six resident coordinators on the best ways in which regional commissions could support their work.

ESCAP is working on a note to provide guidance and allocate clear responsibilities with respect to dealing with common country assessments, United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks and engagement with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams. Closer relationships with country teams will also allow ESCAP to ensure that its regional normative frameworks and resolutions are followed up and implemented at the country level with the help of resident coordinators and country teams, and that its regional analytical work benefits from inputs from the teams.

Arab region

ESCWA continued to make its technical and policy capacity available to the United Nations country teams through engaged participation in the Peer Support Group, where it provided substantive support for the preparation of all country assessment and development frameworks under review during the year.

In areas where it has a large programme of work, ESCWA participated in relevant United Nations country team meetings and ensured regular communication with resident coordinators on technical cooperation activities.

Resident coordinators or their representatives participated in the 2017 and 2018 Arab Regional Forums for Sustainable Development.

Latin America and the Caribbean

ECLAC convened a working meeting of the resident coordinators from the region in April 2018, on the margins of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, seeking to strengthen the channels of communication between the resident coordinators and the Commission. Participants emphasized the importance of holding such meetings on a regular basis to ensure coordination between the national and regional levels of the United Nations development system, and agreed to meet at least once a year on the margins of the Forum.

ECLAC will further encourage the participation of the United Nations Development Group regional team for Latin America and the Caribbean and resident coordinators in the meetings of its subsidiary intergovernmental bodies.

During the reporting period, ECLAC organized, together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, two joint meetings with the resident coordinators from the region on the synergies between human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals.

79. The regional-global nexus has also been strengthened, inter alia, through the continued reporting of the outcomes of the regional forums on sustainable development to the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Steps were taken to ensure effective high-level reporting of outcomes of the regional forums to the high-level political forum beginning in 2017, through the organization of a session for the Chairs of the five regional forums as part of the ministerial segment of the high-level political forum. It is expected that that practice will be continued this year and in the future, as the ministerial declaration of the 2017 high-level political forum welcomed the inputs of the 2017 regional forums and recognized the opportunity that they provide for peer learning, reviews, sharing of best practices and discussion among a variety of stakeholders.

80. The nexus has also been strengthened through other thematic intergovernmental processes in which the regional commissions serve as platforms for the follow-up and review of globally agreed frameworks and contribute the regional voice for the formulation of global frameworks. In 2017, for example, the regional commissions led in the organization of regional consultations on migration ahead of the global stocktaking meeting held in Mexico in December 2017, in the context of the preparations for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

81. Close collaboration among member States, regional commissions and the global level is also contributing to the building of robust and accountable global statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals. The regional commissions are well positioned to explore and describe existing statistical processes and, with the participation of member States, test solutions that could benefit countries in the region and beyond. The outcomes of such efforts provide valuable inputs to global decision-making on statistical issues. The development of the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals is a case in point.

82. ECE has adopted this approach in facilitating the development of national reporting platforms for Sustainable Development Goal statistics and recommending practical methods for improving communication across data providers. This has been followed in other regions and supported at the global level. Initiatives currently under way include the development of good practices in preparing the statistical annexes for voluntary national reviews and quick-start guides for promoting data interoperability and efficiency.

83. The Statistical Conference of the Americas contributes to the progress of policies on statistics and statistical activities in the countries of the region and promotes international, regional and bilateral cooperation among national statistical offices and international and regional agencies. The Conference held its ninth meeting in Mexico in November 2017, focusing on bolstering commitment to sustainability and strengthened national statistics systems with a view to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

84. The regional commissions have also provided the regional building blocks for the review of global frameworks such as the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and are preparing for upcoming reviews such as the 2019 global review of the International Conference on Population and Development.

C. Enhanced interregional cooperation among the regional commissions

85. Since the issuance of the previous report, the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions have met 10 times in person, on the margins of other meetings or through videoconferences. Their meetings have resulted in coordinated positions and contributions to regional responses in support of the 2030 Agenda, including on the repositioning of the United Nations development system to better support member States, as well as on migration and other matters. The regional commissions also organized a joint session on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the regional and subregional levels at the 2017 high-level political forum, as well as joint side events at, inter alia, meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Population and Development, and the multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals.

86. The regional commissions also continued to collaborate in other areas, such as energy, trade, statistics and road safety.

87. The regional commissions have been deepening their bilateral and collective collaboration in the implementation of the energy-related Sustainable Development Goals and to support the capacities of countries in renewable energy, among other areas. Since 2010, they have also jointly organized annual International Forums on Energy for Sustainable Development. The 2017 Forum, held in Astana, provided the opportunity to reflect on the achievements accomplished so far and further pursue a common agenda aimed at meeting the challenges of sustainable energy.

88. ESCAP, ECA and ECLAC are working together to foster the exchange of ideas and good practices in order to enable Governments in their respective regions to negotiate preferential trade agreements that result in more equitable sharing of the benefits of expanded trade among various sectors of society. ECA, ESCWA and ESCAP jointly developed a three-year project to strengthen the capacity of selected countries in their respective regions to measure, monitor and improve their performance in regional integration within those regions.

89. The regional commissions are also part of a team of United Nations development system entities that are jointly implementing a programme on data and statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals, spanning the global, regional, subregional, national and local levels to support the implementation of the Goals.

90. The regional commissions are collaborating, under the leadership of ECE, in the preparation of road safety performance reviews, which take a holistic approach to road safety and identify specific challenges and solutions at the national level. The regional commissions and the Special Envoy for Road Safety have also worked closely to establish the United Nations Road Safety Fund, as mandated by the General Assembly, which was launched in April 2018. ECA, ECE and the secretariat of the Special Envoy recently completed a road safety performance review in Uganda, which was the first in this series of policy advisory initiatives.

III. Next steps

91. The regional commissions will continue to carry out their functions and mandates, including supporting Member States in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with an integrated approach and in line with national and regional priorities.

92. In relation to the ongoing repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, the General Assembly, in its resolution 72/279, endorsed a phased approach to revamping the United Nations development system at the regional level. As part of that approach, a dedicated work stream will be launched to optimize working arrangements under existing mandates, while reviewing options, on a region-by-region basis, for longer-term repositioning of the regional assets of the United Nations and to ensure greater coherence among the regional commissions and other entities of the United Nations development system that are actively engaged at the regional level.